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THE USE OF DEUTERONOMY 32:39 IN MONOTHEISTIC CONTROVERSIES IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

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The central theme of Deuteronomy can be stated in a single sentence: it is a call to the service of one God by an elect people centered around one sanctuary, through obedience to the law in the land which God has given.¹ The belief in the one God is the central issue in the theology of Deuteronomy. In later times, the monotheistic statements of Deuteronomy (especially Deut 4:35.39; 6:4; 7:9; 32:39) are used by the monotheistic religions of Late Antiquity, Judaism and Christianity, to support their argument against those who did not believe in one God. In this article we shall concentrate on one of the most important monotheistic texts of Deuteronomy, namely 32:39. Firstly, we study the form and meaning of Deut 32:39 in its literary context. Secondly, we examine the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this text in rabbinic literature. Because of the abundance of the material we confine ourselves to those texts in which one can identify some sort of controversy about the belief in one God.

Deuteronomy 32:39 in Its Literary Context

As far as the belief in one God is concerned, Deuteronomy is not concerned with a theoretical monotheism, but rather gives a confession of faith. The monotheism of Deuteronomy emerged from the struggle against idolatry.² Moreover, the decline of Israel is attributed to the following of other gods.³ The existence of other gods is not denied, however, only their power and significance for Israel. Deuteronomy stresses the incomparability of YHWH (e. g. 3:24; 4:7-8; 10:17) or the uniqueness of YHWH for *Israel* (e.g. 4:19; 5:6-7 [= Ex 20:2-3]. *Israel*

¹ A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCBC; Grand Rapids-London, 1979), 57-58. Compare: O. Kaiser, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament. Eine Einführung in ihre Ergebnisse und Probleme* (Gütersloh, 1984⁵) 136.

² C.J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (POS 5; Leiden, 1966), 72.

³ M. Hutter, "Das Werden des Monotheismus im alten Israel", in: E. Brox et al. (eds.), *Anfänge der Theologie. Fs. J.B. Bauer* (Graz, 1987) 36. In many places the following of other gods is condemned: Deut 5:7; 8:9-10; 13; 31:16; 31:17.

came to know YHWH as the God who interferes in history, who transcends the forces of nature and of other gods, and therefore this God demanded the exclusive worship of Israel. The recognition of his uniqueness and exclusiveness for Israel could only lead to the recognition of his absoluteness.

In Deut 32:39 one finds one of the affirmations of the absolute uniqueness of YHWH (compare: 4:35, 39; 6:4; 7:9). The text is part of the large poem Deut 32:1-43, which is commonly called *the Song of Moses*.⁴ After the 'introduction' (v. 1-6: the loyalty of YHWH versus the disloyalty of Israel) the text continues with a looking back on the beginning of the relation between YHWH and Israel (v. 7-18). YHWH's mercy is outlined in connection with Israel's apostasy. The reaction of YHWH against Israel is one of judgment with a foreign nation as his instrument (v. 19-25). However, the judgment is being restrained and changes into a complaint against Israel's enemies (v. 26-36), that results in revenge and recompense (v. 37-42). The text ends with a call to joy because of the judgement (v. 43).

Deut 32:37-42 is the third speech of YHWH in the Song of Moses,⁵ introduced by **וַיֹּאמֶר**.⁶ The nations are probably the addressees, alt-

⁴ For an analysis of Deut 32:1-43 see C.J. Labuschagne, "The Song of Moses. Its Framework and Structure", in: I.H. Eybers et al., *De Fructu Oris Sui. Festschrift A. van Selms* (POS 9; Leiden, 1971), 85-98. See also O. Eissfeldt, *Das Lied Moses Deuteronomium 32 1-43 und das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Psalm 78 samt einer Analyse der Umgebung des Mose-Liedes* (BVSAP.H 104/5; Berlin, 1958); W.F. Albright, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses", *VT* 9 (1959), 339-346; R. Meyer, "Die Bedeutung von Deuteronomium 32, 8f.43 (4Q) für die Auslegung des Moseliedes", in: A. Kuschke (ed.), *Verbannung und Heimkehr. Festschrift W. Rudolph* (Tübingen, 1961), 197-209; S. Carillo Alday, *El Cántico de Moisés (Dt 32)* (Madrid, 1970); St. Hidal, "Some Reflections on Deuteronomy 32", *ASTI* 11 (1978), 15ff; T. Trapp, *Dispute and Display. The Song of Moses in Deut 32:1-43*, Diss. Heidelberg 1980; M. Lana, "Deuteronomio e Angelologia alla Luce di una Variante Qumranica (4Q Dt 32,8)", *Henoch* 5 (1983), 179-205; P.-M. Bogaert, "Les trois rédactions conservées et la forme originale de l'envoi du Cantique de Moïse (Dt 32:43)", in: N. Lohfink (ed.), *Das Deuteronomium. Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* (BETL 68; Leuven, 1985), 329-339; J. Luyten, "The Song of Moses (Dt 32:1-43)", in: Lohfink, *Das Deuteronomium*, 341-347; A. Reichert, "The Song of Moses (Dt. 32) and the Quest for Early Deuteronomic Psalmody", in: *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, August 4-12, 1985* (Jerusalem, 1986), 53-60; J.C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism. The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (BETL 91; Leuven, 1990), 155-160.

⁵ The first speech of YHWH begins in v. 20 (**וַיֹּאמֶר**), the second in v. 26 (**אֲמַרְחִי**)

⁶ Both LXX and Qumran reads YHWH as subject of the verb **אָמַר** in v. 37. The targumim on v. 37, however, have another subject: 'the nations of the world' (Neofiti 1; Fragment-Targums), 'the enemy' (Add. 27031). According to these targumim **אֱלֹהֵינוּ** in v. 37 refers therefore to the God of Israel! Targum Onkelos

though it is not stated quite clearly. These verses continue the thought of YHWH's destruction of the enemies, described in v. 26-36, with the ironical questioning after the power of their gods in whom they have trusted.⁷ The climax of the passage is v. 39:

ראו עתה כי אני הוא	aA	See now, that I, I, am He,
ואין אלהים עמדי	aB	and there is no god with me;
אני אמית ואחיה	bA'	I kill and make alive;
מחצתי ואני ארפא	bA''	I wound and I heal;
ואין מידי מציל	bB	and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

We consider Deut 32:39 as a form of divine self-predication within a lyric self-praise.⁸ Prosodically, the verse is made up out of two lines, a bicolon and a tricolon. The first line (v. 39a) contains four plus three stresses, the second line (v. 39b) three plus three plus three stresses.⁹ Both lines are joined together by way of external parallelism. The first colon of the first line (v. 39aA), in which occurs the personal pronoun **אני** two times, is balanced by the first two cola of the second line (v. 39bA), in which the personal pronoun **אני** occurs also two times, one time in each colon. The second colon of the first line (v. 39aB) is balanced by the third colon of the second line (v. 39bB) in that in both cola the negative **אין** preceded by the copulativum **ו** occurs, as well as the suffix 1st sg m (v. 39aB: **עמדי**; v. 39bB: **מידי**).

In v. 39aA (**כי אני אני הוא**) the doubling of the personal pronoun **אני** is striking. Outside our text it occurs only in Is 43:11.25; 51:12 (each time with **אנכי**). The function of the doubling is probably one of stress

does not make explicit who is the subject of **אמר** in v. 37.

⁷ Mayes, *o.c.*, 392.

⁸ M. Dijkstra, *Gods voorstelling. Predikatieve expressie van zelfopenbaring in Oudoosterse teksten en Deutero-Jesaja* (Dissertationes Neerlandicae, Series Theologica 2; Kampen, 1980), 40-41.

⁹ As far as syntax is concerned it is not impossible to read v. 39a as a tricolon (two plus two plus three stresses). The object-clause starts with **כי** and exists out of two parts, the second part introduced by **ו**. If v. 39a is read as one colon (of four stresses), as we do, the syntactical unit of the object-clause is slightly neglected. However, the rhythmical pattern 2+2+3 followed by 3+3+3 is quite exceptional. Moreover, the first colon ('See now') would be unbalanced. For the prosodic theory of classical Hebrew, especially as far as rhythm and metrum is concerned, see H. van Grol, *De versbouw in het klassieke Hebreeuws. I. Metriek* (Amsterdam, 1986). Compare: L. Alonso Schökel, *Das Alte Testament als literarisches Kunstwerk* (Köln, 1971); J.C.L. Gibson, "Stress and Vocalic Change in Hebrew: A Diachronic Study", *Journal of Linguistics* 2 (1966), 35-56.

and contrast.¹⁰ Therefore, the best translation of the phrase **כִּי אֲנִי הוּא** would be: 'that I alone am He'. The phrase **אֲנִי הוּא** does not occur on many places,¹¹ outside Deut 32:39 only in Deutero-Isaiah (41:4; 43:10.13; 46:4; 48:12).¹² In many cases **הוּא** functions as demonstrative.¹³ In Is 41:4; 43:10 **הוּא אֲנִי** functions as derivation of and substitution for the phrase **אֲנִי יְהוָה**, in Is 43:13 as derivation of **אֲנִי אֵל**. Some consider the independent use of the phrase in Deut 32:39 and Is 48:12 as a special monotheistic revelation formula.¹⁴ However, we should be reserved with this designation, because the phrase does not occur in many places, and is also used in polytheistic contexts.¹⁵ Probably, also in Deut 32:39 we can take the phrase **אֲנִי הוּא** as a substitution of the phrase **אֲנִי יְהוָה**. The meaning of the phrase is made explicit in the same verse. First, by the next colon in the same line 'and there is no god with me' (v. 39aB), and second by the cola with which Deut 32:39aA has external balance, namely v. 39bA: 'I kill and make alive; I wound and I heal'.

In the second colon of the first line (v. 39aB: 'and there is no god with me') **אֵין** functions as adverb. It expresses the non-existence of something or somebody. In this text it concerns the non-existence of a god in company (**עִמִּי**) of YHWH. On the basis of this colon alone it is difficult to decide if it is a claim for absoluteness of YHWH (i.e. the existence of other gods is being denied), or of incomparability of YHWH (i.e. the existence of other gods is not being denied, only their effectiveness is incomparable to that of YHWH).¹⁶ However, the

¹⁰ L. Köhler, *Deuterjesaja (Jes 40-55) stilkritisch untersucht* (BZAW 37; Giessen, 1923), 59; D. Michel, "Nur ich bin Jahwe. Erwägungen zur sogenannten Selbstvorstellungsformel", *Theologia Viatorum* 11 (1973), 150; H.-J. Fabry, art. **הוּא**, *TWAT* II, 367; C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen, 1956), § 129b; GK § 133kl; Dijkstra, *o.c.*, 249-250.

¹¹ See R. Rendtorff, "Die Offenbarungsvorstellungen im Alten Israel", in: *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, 34; W. Zimmerli, "'Offenbarung' im Alten Testament. Ein Gespräch mit R. Rendtorff", *EvTh* 22 (1962), 21; J. Morgenstern, "Deutero-Isaiah's Terminology for 'universal God'", *JBL* 62 (1943), 273; N. Walker, "Concerning HU' and 'ANI HU'", *ZAW* 74 (1962), 205-206. For an evaluation of the different positions see Dijkstra, *o.c.*, 76-77.

¹² Compare also Ps 102:28 (**אֲחֵהּ הוּא**).

¹³ GK § 136a.

¹⁴ C.R. North, *The Second Isaiah, Chapters XL-LV* (Oxford, 1964), 94; K. Elliger, *Deuterjesaja. I: Jesaja 40,1-45,7* (BKAT XII/1; Neukirchen, 1978), 124-125; H.-J. Fabry, *TWAT*, I, 367; H. Wildberger, "Der Monotheismus Deuterjesajas", in: H. Donner et al. (eds.), *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie. Festschrift für Walter Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 1977), 527.

¹⁵ Dijkstra, *o. c.*, 248.

¹⁶ Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 114, note 3, prefers the second opinion: 'There is no god like me'.

phrase 'and there is no god with me' (v. 39aB) has its balance in the third colon of the second line: 'and there is none that can deliver out of my hand' (v. 39bB). That is to say, the other gods are powerless. There may exist gods outside YHWH, they may accept offerings, they are powerless gods (v. 37-38), and with that actually 'no god' (v. 21). The incomparability of YHWH confessed in the first line (v. 39a) is strengthened by the *merismus*¹⁷ of the first two cola of the second line (v. 39bA). The polar wordpairs מוֹת / חַיָּה (to kill; to make alive) and רָפָא / חָצָה (to wound; to heal) expresses the totality of this incomparability. There is no area in life where YHWH does not exercise his power. The phrase of the incomparability of YHWH becomes in fact a statement about his uniqueness.¹⁸ It is the acknowledgement that YHWH is the only God. He has control over life and death, and no one can deliver out of his hand.¹⁹

The Use of Deuteronomy 32:39 in Rabbinic Literature

The text of Deut 32:39 is quoted on several places in rabbinic literature. The following texts can be pointed out:²⁰

bPes 68a; bSanh 91b; 104a; Mek, *bo'* 12; *Shirta* 4; *bahodesh Yitro* 5; MRS, 81; Sifre Deut 329; Midrash Tannaim Deut 32:39; Ex r 21:3; Lev r 18:5; Deut r 11:10; Eccl r 1:4,2-3; Gen Rabbati, 29; Eccl z 1:4; M Ps 95; SER, 130; PRE 34; 'Otiyot de Rabbi Aqiba, I:249; Mishnat Rabbi Eliezar, 94; Midrash Hadash, 175; Midrash Haggadol, *wa'era*, 138.

¹⁷ J. Krasovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwest-semitischen* (Bib Or 33; Rome, 1977); E. Noort, "JHWH und das Böse. Bemerkungen zu einer Verhältnisbestimmung", *OTS* 23 (1984), 121-122.

¹⁸ Compare Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 114: "The vindication of Yahweh's incomparable position with regard to the gods attests to His uniqueness, and the obvious conclusion to be drawn from His Incomparability is His 'singleness'." Elsewhere in Deut 32, however, the author speaks freely about other gods. See especially the original text of v. 8 and v. 43 ('sons of god' in stead of 'sons of Israel'; compare LXX and Qumran). In Deut 32:8 it is described how Elyon divided the nations under his sons, giving Jacob/Israel to YHWH (v. 9). According to De Moor, *o. c.*, 156-157 the song of Moses shows the features of a text in transition from polytheism to the recognition of one god above all others.

¹⁹ Deut 32:39 is firmly embedded in the context. The rhetorical question of v. 37 ('Where are their gods') gets an answer in v. 39aB ('and there is no god beside me'), whereas the rhetorical invitation v. 38b ('Let them rise up and help you') is proved powerless in v. 39bB ('and there is none that can deliver out of my hand'). Moreover, compare 'in my hand' (v. 39bB) with 'refuge' (v. 37b) and 'protection' (v. 38b).

²⁰ We made use of A. Hyman, *חזרה הכתבה והמסורה. A Reference Book of the Scriptural Passages Quoted in Talmudic, Midrashic and Early Rabbinic Literature. Second Edition Revised by his Son A.B. Hyman*, I-III (Tel Aviv, 1979), for the collection of the loci in rabbinic literature. In addition to this we made use of indices and notes in editions and translations of rabbinic works.

In most texts in which Deut 32:39 is quoted doctrinal concerns can be observed. Different parts of Deut 32:39 are used as proof-text against some five different heresies. The first part of the verse (v. 39a) is used: 1. against those who believe in no power in heaven (Sifre Deut 329); 2. against those who believe in two powers in heaven (Sifre Deut 329; Mek, *Shirta* 4; *bahodesh Yitro* 5; MRS, 81; Midrash Tannaim on Deut 32:39; SER, 130); 3. and against those who believe that God does not interfere in human affairs (Sifre Deut 329). The second part of the verse (v. 39bA) is quoted against those who do not believe in the resurrection and the world to come (Sifre Deut 329; bPes 68a; bSanh 91b; Midrash Tannaim Deut 32:39; Ex r 21:3; Eccl r 1:4,2-3; SER, 130). Finally, the last part of the verse (v. 39bB) is quoted against those who believe in the merits of the fathers (Sifre Deut 32:39).²¹

In this article we confine ourselves to those texts in which there is some sort of polemic concerning the belief in God: Mek, *bahodesh Yitro* 5 (parallels in Mek, *Shirta* 4 and MRS, 81) and Sifre Deut 329. In the first place we shall go into the content of the pericope of the texts in which Deut 32:39 is quoted. Attention will be paid to the biblical texts quoted, especially to Deut 32:39. In the second place, we shall try to identify the heresies with actual groups in Late Antiquity.

Mekilta de Rabbi Yisma'el, bahodesh Yitro 5

Three texts in rabbinic literature in which Deut 32:39 is quoted in a monotheistic context are very much parallel to each other. Two texts are found in Mek, namely in *Shirta* 4, an explanation related to Ex 15:3-4, and in *bahodesh Yitro* 5, an explanation related to Ex 20:2. The third text is found in MRS, 81, an explanation related to Ex 15:3.²² We confine ourselves to the text in Mek, *bahodesh Yitro* 5, because it is the most elaborated one:²³

²¹ It is the view of R. Aqiba that a father 'merits' certain blessings for his son. See mishna Edduyyot 2:9. Compare Tosefta ySanh 10:1 (27d); mishna Abot 2:2; yBer 4:1 (7d); bBer 27b; bSota 10b; Gen r 55:8; Ex r 44:3, 7; Lev r 36:3, 5; Deut r 3:15; Eccl r 10:9,1; Song r 1:14. For the concept of the merit of the fathers see A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinic Literature and the Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, I-II (New York, 1968), 38; E.E. Urbach, *The Sages - Their Concepts and Beliefs* (English Translation) (Jerusalem, 1975), 499-501.

²² A parallel is also found in Pesikta Rabbati 21, 100b. However, Deut 32:39 is not quoted there.

²³ A critical edition of the text can be found in H.S. Horovitz - I.A. Rabin, *Mekilta de Rabbi Ismael cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus* (Frankfurt a. M., 1931 [reprint Jerusalem 1960]), 219-220. See also J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael. A Critical Edition on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions with an English Translation - Introduction and Notes*, II (Philadelphia,

'I am YHWH your God' (Ex 20:2). Why is this said? For He was revealed at the sea as a mighty hero making war, as it is said: 'YHWH is a man of war' (Ex 15:3), and He was revealed at Sinai as an old man full of mercy, as it is said: 'And they saw the God of Israel etc.' (Ex 24:10). And for the time when they were redeemed, what does it say? 'Like the very heaven for clearness' (Ex 24:10). And it says: 'As I looked, thrones were placed' (Dan 7:9). And it says: 'A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him etc.' (Dan 7:10)

Scripture does not give the nations of the world an opportunity for saying that there are two powers; but (it declares): 'I am YHWH your God' (Ex 20:2). I was in Egypt, I was at the sea. I was at Sinai. I was in the past, I will be in the future to come. I am in this world, I am in the world to come, as it is said: 'See now that I, even I, am He etc.' (Deut 32:39). And it says: 'Even to old age I am He' (Is 46:4). And it says: 'Thus says YHWH, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, YHWH of hosts: I am the first and I am the last' (Is 44:6). And it says: 'Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, YHWH, the first, and with the last, I am He.' (Is 41:4)

The unity of God is the central issue in this midrash.²⁴ The text is introduced with the question: 'Why is this said?' related to the text of Ex 20:2. According to the author of the Midrash a problem is raised by the fact that Ex 20:2 gives two different designations for God: יהוה ('YHWH') and אלהיך ('your God'). Moreover, אלהיך ('your God') is a plural form. However, the text does speak in singular about God: 'I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt' (אנכי ... אשר הוצאתיך). Despite the two different designations and the plural form there are not two gods. God manifests himself in different situations in history in different ways, nevertheless He is one and the same God.

Scriptural quotations are used to describe the different manifestations of God (Ex 15:3; 24:10a; 24:10b; Dan 7:9, 10; Deut 32:39; Is 46:4; 44:6; 41:4). The first two quotations are Ex 15:3a and Ex 24:10a. In these biblical texts two different, even contrasting, manifestations of God can be seen. God can manifest himself as a mighty hero making war, but also as an old man, full of mercy. The text of Ex 15:3a, part

1933 [reprint 1976]), 231-232. According to J. Neusner (*A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, I [London, 1965], 179) the Mekilta de Rabbi Yismael was originally compiled on the basis of discussions between 135 and 150 C.E. According to Strack-Stemberger the final redaction took place in the second half of the third century (H.L. Strack - G. Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* [München 1982⁷] 240). P. Schäfer, "Israel und die Völker der Welt. Zur Auslegung von Mekilta de Rabbi Yisma'el, bahodesh Yitro 5", *FJB* 4 (1976), 62, suggests even an earlier date, namely at the end of the second century C. E., whereas others argues for a much later date for the final redaction (B. Z. Wacholder, "The Date of the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael", *HUCA* 39 [1968], 117-144).

²⁴ In the edition of Horovitz - Rabin this is the third paragraph of the fifth *parasha* of *bahodesh Yitro*. The fifth *parasha* consists of nine paragraphs. Schäfer, *o.c.*, 32-62, demonstrates the redactional unity and arrangement of the paragraphs.

of the song at the Red Sea, which remembers the deliverance out of Egypt, proves the first manifestation: 'YHWH is a man of war'. The text of Ex 24:10a ('And they saw the God of Israel') is used as proof-text for the second manifestation of God. The quotation of Ex 24:10a as a proof-text for the merciful manifestation of God is at first sight obscure. However, Ex 24:10 is in the first place part of the Sinai-story. In rabbinic tradition the image of an old sage who teaches is used to describe the giving of the Torah at Sinai.²⁵ In the second place, it must be noted that the second designation for God in Ex 20:2, i. e. 'God' ('the God of Israel') is used in Ex 24:10. In the third place, God's attribute of mercy can, indirectly, be found in Ex 24:10-11 itself. The attitude of God towards the elders of Israel shows his mercy.²⁶ Although the elders of Israel had looked upon God, 'He did not lay his hand on the chief man of the people of Israel' (Ex 24:11a). Although 'they saw God, they ate and drank' (Ex 24:11b). Elsewhere in Scripture it is stated that no man may see God and live (Ex 33:20: 'For no man shall see me and live'). In the fourth place, God's compassion can also be found in a rabbinic interpretation of Ex 24:10. The expression 'the brick-work of sapphire stone' which occurs in the same verse (Ex 24:10b), but which is not quoted in our midrash, refers in rabbinic tradition to the work in bricks in which the Israelites were engaged in Egypt. The compassion of God is showed by the fact that before they were redeemed, the brickwork was placed as a mark in heaven, under the throne of God²⁷ or under his feet.²⁸ In other texts the compassion of God is showed by the fact that the Shekinah was with the Israelites in their slavery. After Israel was redeemed from Egypt the brickwork was placed where the brick was generally kept and it was seen no more in heaven.²⁹ This gives an explanation for the obscure reference to Ex 24:10b in our midrash ('And as the very heaven for clearness'). The brightness of the heaven symbolises the end of the slavery, and the joy of God.

It is not clear why the text of this midrash is as obscure as it is here.

²⁵ Compare Pes r 21 (100b) ('as an old man'); *Midrash Haggadol. Exodus*, 295 ('an old man wrapped in his cloak').

²⁶ This is the opinion of J. Goldin, *The Song at the Sea. Being a Commentary on a Commentary in Two Parts* (New Haven, 1971), 127, and A.F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1977), 38, n. 5, and 40.

²⁷ Targum Pseudo-Yonathan on Ex 24:9-10.

²⁸ Lev r 23:8. Compare ySuk 4:3 (54c), and Song r 4:8,1, with the same tradents. Close parallels can be found in PRE 48 (116a, b); Sifre Zuta Num 10:35 (267); Tanh B, *beshallah* 11.

²⁹ Mek, *Pisha Bo* 14.

It could have been mistakenly reproduced from other passages.³⁰ However, it remains unclear then why the first part of the text in other passages ('Whenever Israel is enslaved the Shekinah, as it were, is enslaved with them') is missing here, and in the parallel text *Shirta* 4. One could simply suggest that the midrash of the brick-work of sapphire stone under God's throne as a symbol for the slavery in Egypt, and for the compassion of God with Israel was well-known. It was therefore not necessary to give the complete version of the midrash.³¹ This suggestion is not really convincing since in other contemporary sources this particular midrash is quoted completely indeed. The best explanation is that by way of *homoiooteleuton* this passage has fallen out. Originally *bahodesh Yitro* 5 contained the following passage after the quotation of Ex 24:10a ('And they saw the God of Israel etc.'): *Another interpretation of 'And they saw the God of Israel etc.' (Ex 24:10). Such was the view until they were redeemed,*³² or simply: *Such was the view until they were redeemed.*

After the quotation of Ex 15:3 and Ex 24:10 two texts from the book of Daniel are used: 'As I looked, thrones were placed' (Dan 7:9); 'A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him etc.' (Dan 7:10). The point of the quotation of Dan 7:9-10 is, as Goldin³³ states rightly, that the verses of Daniel serve to demonstrate that it is one and the same God who appears in different aspects. The text of Dan 7:9 suggests that he is an old man (a merciful aspect), and in the following verse there is something fiery (a militant aspect). So this proof-text is on line with both Ex 15:3 and Ex 24:10.³⁴

The unity of God is the central issue in every part of this midrash.

³⁰ So I. Lewy (*Ein Wort über die Mechilta des R. Simon* [Breslau, 1889], 9, n. 1); compare Horowitz - Rabin (*Mechilta*, 219, note on line 16), who agree with Lewy as far as the parallel passage *Shirta* 4 is concerned.

³¹ So Schäfer, *o. c.*, 40.

³² This is the explanation of Goldin (*o. c.*, 127) for the omission in the parallel text *Shirta* 4.

³³ Goldin, *o. c.*, 128.

³⁴ In other texts in rabbinic literature the text of Dan 7:9 is used to show the misconception that the belief in more gods is described by Daniel. The text states 'thrones (plural) were placed'. In bSanh 38b this text is used as a passage 'which the *minim* have taken as grounds for their heresy'. However, the talmud teaches also that 'their refutation is found near at hand', namely 'one that was ancient did sit' (singular) (Dan 7:9). Segal, *Two Powers*, 40, in his interpretation of *bahodesh Yitro* 5, states that in Dan 7:9 two thrones in heaven 'imply two different figures to fill them'. In his opinion this is a reference to the conception of the two powers in heaven. In this interpretation it remains unclear, however, why Dan 7:10 is quoted to make the point of the singular form, when the singular is so near at hand in Dan 7:9 ('one that was ancient did sit').

Those who say that Scripture itself teaches the doctrine of the two powers by quoting different passages from Scripture (Ex 15:3 against Ex 24:10; Dan 7:9 against Dan 7:10) are counteracted by the quotation of Ex 20:2 in which the different designations and the plural forms point to one and the same God. Also the second part of the midrash shows clearly that the singular forms of the sentence in Ex 20:2 are used as an argument against those who declare the existence of more than one God on the basis of the same and other texts from the Old Testament. Seven statements are made in which God is referred to by the personal pronoun 1st person singular ('I was in Egypt, I was at the sea. I was at Sinai. I was in the past, I will be in the future to come. I am in this world, I am in the world to come'),³⁵ and four texts are quoted at first sight to illustrate these statements: Deut 32:39; Is 46:4; Is 44:6; Is 41:4.³⁶

The biblical texts quoted correspond to the seven statements in that the personal pronoun 1st singular (אני) is used seven times. In the quoted part of Deut 32:39 (כי אני אני הוא) it occurs twice, in Is 46:4 once (ועד זקנה אני הוא), in Is 44:6 twice (אני ראשון ואני אחרון), and in Is 41:4 again twice (אני יהוה ראשון ואה אחרנים אני הוא). Moreover, the texts quoted occur in a context of polemic against idolatry. In Deut 32:39 (ואין אלהים עמדי) and in Is 44:6 (ומבלעדי אין אלהים) it is explicitly quoted that there is no other god. These texts show that wherever 'I' is repeated twice in Scripture it refers to one God. Besides, the texts of Deut 32:39, Is 46:4 and Is 41:4 have the expression אני הוא ('I [am] He') in common.

A closer examination of the seven statements, however, shows that the first three of them are already proved in the first part of the midrash. Ex 20:2 is a proof-text of the first statement ('I was in Egypt'), Ex 15:3 of the second ('I was at the sea') and Ex 24:10 of the third ('I was at Sinai'). It is likely therefore that the four texts which follow the seven statements (Deut 32:39; Is 46:4; Is 44:6; Is 41:4) are used as proof-texts for the remaining four statements ('I was in the past, I will be in the future to come. I am in this world, I am in the world to come'). Four texts are used to prove four statements. The case is not,

³⁵ In the parallel texts (Mek, *Shirta* 4; MRS, 81) the 1st person singular is replaced by the 3rd person singular ('He was in Egypt etc.')

³⁶ For the importance of numerical sayings see A. Wünsche, "Die Zahlensprüche in Talmud und Midrasch", *ZDMG* 65 (1911), 57-100, 395-421; 66 (1912), 414-459; G. Nádor, "Some Numeral Categories in Ancient Rabbinical Literature: The Numbers Ten, Seven and four", *Acta Orientalia* 14 (1962), 301-315; W.S. Towner, *The Rabbinic 'Enumeration of Scriptural Examples'* (Leiden, 1973); K. -E. Grözinger, "Der Gesang in der Theologie der Rabbinen. Der Midrasch von den zehn Liedern", *FJB* 4 (1976), 81-99.

however, that one text proves one statement. It is our opinion that each text here functions as a proof for the four statements all together. The text of Is 44:6 ('*I am the first and I am the last*') and Is 41:4 ('*I, YHWH, the first, and with the last, I am He*') contain the polar word-pair ראשון ('first') and אחרון ('last'). The correspondence with the four statements is evident. The word ראשון corresponds with 'the past' and 'this world', whereas אחרון corresponds with 'the future to come' and 'the world to come'. Also Is 46:3-4 contain a polar expression. In v. 3 it is stated that God was with Israel 'from the birth' and 'from the womb'; in v. 4 God assures that he will be with them 'even to old age' and 'until grey hairs'. So God was with Israel in the past, and he will be with them in the future. Finally, also Deut 32:39 is used as proof-text. Anyhow, it is a proof for the last statement 'I am in the world to come'. In rabbinic literature the phrase '*I kill and make alive*' (Deut 32:39bA') is one of four promises which contain an allusion to the resurrection of the dead.³⁷ However, when the Isaianic texts quoted function as proof-texts for all the four statements, one might suppose the same function for Deut 32:39. Probably, the midrash interprets the activity of killing as referring to the past and to this world, whereas the activity of making alive refers to the future to come and to the world to come. One can find a confirmation of this interpretation of Deut 32:39 in Targum Neofiti 1, which renders Deut 32:39bA' as follows: 'It is I who puts to death *in this world* the living and who makes alive the dead *in the world to come*'.³⁸ There is still another possibility. The midrash might be referring to a tradition of interpretation of Deut 32:39 which is found in the Targum of Pseudo-Yonathan.³⁹ The Targum renders Deut 32:39aA as follows: 'See now that I am He *who is* and *who was* and I am He *who will be*'.⁴⁰ We might assume that the author of Mek, *bahodesh Yitro* 5, was acquainted with either one or both tradition(s) of interpretation of Deut 32:39aA contained in the targumim. The affinity of Deut 32:39 with the Isaianic texts quoted in the midrash is most evident when we read Deut 32:39 with the targumic renderings.

³⁷ The other texts are: Num 23:10; Deut 33:6; Hos 6:2. See Sifre Deut 329; bPes 68a; bSanh 91b; Midrash Tannaim Deut 32:39; Ex r 21:3; Eccl r 1:4,2-3; SER, 130.

³⁸ See: R. Le Déaut, *Targum du Pentateuque. Traduction des deux recensions palestiniennes complètes. Tome IV. Deutéronome* (Paris, 1980), 276. Compare also the Fragment-Targum of the Pentateuch (MS Vatican Ebr. 440).

³⁹ We find this tradition also in the Palestinian Targum contained in the manuscript Add. 27031 of the British Museum. See Le Déaut, *o.c.*, 277.

⁴⁰ The Aramaic of Targum Pseudo-Yonathan reads as follows אנה הוא דהוי ויהיה . ואנה הוא דעחיד למחוי . See M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (AnBib 27; Rome, 1967), 111.

The prooftexts Deut 32:39; Is 46:4; Is 44:6; Is 41:4 are joined together with the other prooftexts (Ex 20:2; 15:3; 24:10) by the mentioning of the seven statements. The first three refer to the first part of the midrash, the last four to the second part. If this interpretation is correct the isolated position of Dan 7:9, 10 is striking. Possibly, it forms a later interpolation, due to the popularity of Dan 7:9 with regard to the belief in two gods.

The central theme of the midrash can be described as counteracting the belief in two gods. The midrash states that the biblical texts are quoted in order not to give the nations of the world an opportunity for saying that there are two powers. In the first part of the midrash texts are quoted which show different aspects of God, and which seem to contradict each other (Ex 15:3 against Ex 24:10; Dan 7:9 against Dan 7:10). This can result in the opinion that Scripture states that there is more than one God. However, Ex 20:2 and the last four texts (Deut 32:39; Is 46:4; Is 44:6; Is 41:4) are quoted to counteract this opinion. The text speaks of two different *attributes* of God: that of mercy and that of justice,⁴¹ and not of two gods. It is striking that the formulation in our midrash is exactly the opposite of the standard rabbinic identification. Usually the attribute of mercy is connected with the name YHWH, and that of justice with the designation Elohim. YHWH is in our midrash, however, 'a man of war' and Elohim 'an old man full of mercy'. This specific formulation of the attributes of God helps to refute those who think that there are two divine principles instead of two attributes. By connecting an aspect of justice to YHWH, and an aspect of mercy to Elohim, the danger of isolating two divine principles is diminished.⁴²

Different answers have been given to the question if the nations of the world (those who believe in two powers) denotes a specific group in history. According to some the text is a polemic against Christians,⁴³ according to others against certain Gnostic groups,⁴⁴ or the

⁴¹ A thorough discussion about the attribute of mercy and of justice in Urbach, *o.c.*, 448-461.

⁴² Urbach, *o.c.*, 451-452: 'The use of a Name that denotes one attribute does not annul the existence of the other. Both attributes are of equal importance'.

⁴³ So R.T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud und Midrash* (London, 1903 [reprint New York-London, 1966]), 301; M. Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* (New York, 1950), 86; K. Hruby, *Die Stellung der jüdischen Gesetzeslehrer zur werdenden Kirche* (Zürich, 1971), 59 ff.

⁴⁴ A. Marmorstein, "The Unity of God in Rabbinic Literature", *HUCA* 1 (1924), 489; K. Rudolph, "Randerscheinungen des Judentums und das Problem der Entstehung der Gnosis", in: *Gnosis und Gnostizismus* (Darmstadt, 1975), 786; Segal, *Two Powers*, 57-59; A.N. Dahl - A.F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of

pagan-hellenistic world in general.⁴⁵ According to Segal the situation is very complex. The conception of the 'two powers in heaven' goes back to early hellenistic Judaism, which was acquainted with the doctrine of the *logos* and with the idea of a mediator of creation. Philo used the term 'second god' to describe the *logos*.⁴⁶ In rabbinic literature it may once have designated a specific group of sectarians (e. g. Christianity, Gnosticism, Jewish apocalyptic and mystical groups), but it appears to have become a stock characterization of heresy toward the end of the tannaitic period. It was understood as a title for all binitarian or dualistic heresies and no longer referred to one particular sect.⁴⁷

To this we can add that the character of our text is less polemic than has been suggested. The midrash is part of a great redactional unity, i.e. *bahodesh Yitro* 5. The theme of this redactional unit of nine midrashim is the relationship of Israel and the nations of the world, as regards the Tora and the Revelation at Sinai. The third paragraph (the text under consideration) is concerned with the most important aspect of the Revelation, the belief in one God. The tone of the whole text of *bahodesh Yitro* 5 is much more apologetic than polemic.⁴⁸

Sifre Deuteronomy 329 (on Deut 32:39)⁴⁹

'See now that I, I, am he' (Deut 32:39aA). This is a response to those who say there is no power in heaven. He who says there are two powers in heaven is answered: "Has it not yet been written: '*And there is no god beside me*'" (Deut 32:39aB). And similarly (for one who says) he has not the strength to kill nor to revive, (he has not the strength) to do evil nor to make good, Scripture says: '*See now that I, I, am he ... I kill and make alive*' (Deut 32:39aA, bA'). And also: '*Thus says YHWH, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, YHWH of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god*' (Is 44:6).

God", *JSJ* 9 (1978), 16ff.

⁴⁵ Schäfer, *o.c.*, 60-61. Schäfer is possibly right in saying that the opponents are not the Christians, Gnostics or pagans themselves, but Jews who were influenced by one system or another.

⁴⁶ E.g. Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesis* 2:62; cf. Segal, *o.c.*, 159-181.

⁴⁷ Segal, *o.c.*, 153-154. Compare J. Maier, *Jüdische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum in der Antike* (EdF 177; Darmstadt, 1982), 166-169.

⁴⁸ The conceptions of these midrashim can be put between the extremes of particularism (the revelation is just for Israel) and universalism (the torah is for all the nations). The text of *bahodesh Yitro* 5 gives several possible answers to the question as to the relation of Israel and the nations in connection with the revelation on Sinai. Compare Schäfer, *o.c.* 59.

⁴⁹ L. Finkelstein, *Siphre ad Deuteronomium H.S. Horovitzii schedis usuis cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus* (Berlin, 1939 [reprint New York, 1969]), 379-380. Because *Siphre* is not homogeneous it is difficult to date the midrash. According to Strack - Stemberger (*o.c.*, 254) the final redaction took place at the end of the third century CE.

Another interpretation: '*I kill and make alive*' (Deut 32:39bA'). This is one of four promises which contain an allusion to the resurrection of the dead: '*I kill and make alive*' (Deut 32:39bA'); '*Let me die the death of the righteous*' (Num 23:10); '*Let Reuben live, and not die*' (Deut 33:6); '*After two days he will revive us*' (Hos 6:2). I might think that death was for one while life was for another. (Therefore) Scripture says: '*I wound and I heal*' (Deut 32:39bA'). Just as wounding and healing is for one (and the same), so is death and life for one (and the same).

'*And there is none that can deliver out of my hand*' (Deut 32:39bB). No father can deliver his sons. Abraham could not deliver Ishmael, and Isaac could not deliver Esau. From this I know only that fathers cannot deliver their sons. From where do I learn that brothers may not deliver their brothers? Scripture teaches: '*No man can ransom his brother*' (Ps 49:8). Isaac did not deliver Ishmael, Jacob did not deliver Esau. Even if a man were to give all the money in the world, it would not give him atonement, as it is said: '*No man can ransom his brother ... his ransom would cost too much ...*' (Ps 49:8-9). A soul is dear. When a man sins with it, there is no compensation.

The text of Sifre Deut 329 consists of three paragraphs. Each paragraph is linked up with a part of Deut 32:39. The first paragraph is connected especially with Deut 32:39a, and is concerned with the belief in one God. The thought of the paragraph is developed in three steps. Firstly, the writer of the midrash finds here a connection between v. 39 and the rhetorical question of v. 37. Those who say *in the text of Deuteronomy* 'Where is (are) their god(s)' are those who deny any power in heaven.⁵⁰ They are refuted by the presentation of the evidence. God himself answers those who deny his existence by saying '*See now that I, I, am he*' (Deut 32:39aA). Secondly, there may be others, continues the midrash, who believe in more powers in heaven, since אלהימו ('Their god[s]') in Deut 32:37 could be read as a plural, as if there were more gods. Moreover, the plural verbforms in Deut 32:38bA could refer to the gods in v. 37 indeed. Apparently, Deut 32:39aA seems to confirm that there are more powers, since the personal pronoun (אני: 'I') is repeated twice. But God corrects the impression that there might be two gods by saying: '*And there is no god beside me*' (Deut 32:39aB). This is confirmed in the Midrash by the quotation of Is 44:6. This text shows that wherever 'I' is repeated twice in Scripture ('*I am the first and I am the last*') it refers to one God ('*Besides me there is no God*'), He is the first, the last, and there is no other. Thirdly, Deut 32:39 is seen by the midrash as an answer to the ironical call in v. 38b ('*Let them rise up and help you, let them be your protection*'). The ironical call of v. 38b is made explicit in the

⁵⁰ Notice that for the author of Sifre Deut 329 it is not God who is the speaker in Deut 32:37 as is the case in MT and LXX. Compare note 6.

midrash ('He has not the strength to kill nor to revive, [he has not the strength] to do evil nor to make good'). These are those who do recognise a power in heaven, but who deny that it interferes in human affairs. They are refuted here by Deut 32:39bA. God is omnipotent, and he does interfere in the life of people.⁵¹

The second paragraph of *piska* 329 is not concerned with the belief in the one God. Its subject is the resurrection of the dead. It is linked up with Deut 32:39bA ('*I kill and make alive; I wound and I heal*'), which contains, according to the midrash, an allusion to the resurrection of the dead, like Num 23:10; Deut 33:6, and Hos 6:2. The second part of the paragraph opposes those who deny the resurrection of the dead on the basis of Deut 32:39bA. The passage might be interpreted in a way that God kills one person and gives life to another. But the passage goes on by saying: '*I wound and I heal*'. Just as the wounding and healing refer to the same person (healthy people need not be healed), so putting to death and bringing to life refer to the same person.⁵² This interpretation of the phrase in Deut 32:39 is also found in bPes 68b and bSanh 91b.⁵³

The third paragraph, finally, is linked up with Deut 32:39bB ('*And there is none that can deliver out of my hand*'). The midrash uses this

⁵¹ The passage introduced by 'And similarly' (או כענין) until the quotation of Is 44:6, i. e. the third step of the first paragraph, is seen by R.T. Herford (*Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* [London, 1903], 299) and H.W. Basser (*Midrashic Interpretation of the Song of Moses* [American University Studies, Series VII Theology and Religion, Vol. 2; New York-Frankfurt a. M.-Bern, 1984], 241) as an interpolation. It is true that this passage interrupts the basic idea of the paragraph. The basic idea is concerned with the belief in one God, and Is 44:6 forms an appropriate conclusion.

⁵² Segal, *Two Powers*, 86-87, interprets this text as a reference to a doctrine which is either dualistic or polytheistic. According to him Deut 32:39b proves that there are not two Powers in heaven, but only one. On p. 84 Segal translates this part of the text as follows: 'I might think that death was by one (power) while life was by another. Scripture teaches: '*I wound and I heal*' (Deut 32:39). Just as wounding and healing is by one (power), so is death and life by one (power alone)'. Although Segal's translation 'by one' for באחד is not impossible (ב can indicate who or what has caused an effect) it gives a very unlikely interpretation of the text. It does not explain why the verse proves that wounding and healing are done by one God, any more than it proves that killing and giving life are done by one God. Cfr. Basser, *o.c.*, 241-242.

⁵³ The text of bPes 68b reads: 'Our Rabbis taught: '*I kill and make alive*' (Deut 32:39). I might interpret, I kill one person and give life to another, as the world goes on: therefore Scripture teaches: '*I wound and I heal*' (Deut 32:39). Just as the wounding and healing refer to the same person, so putting to death and bringing to life refer to the same person. This refutes those who maintain that resurrection is not intimated in the Torah' (parallel in bSanh 91b). Compare Gen r 95:1; Eccl r 1:4,2.

phrase against those who claim that fathers can save their sons. This claim is possibly also based on contextual exegesis, as far as 'the rock in which they took refuge' (v. 37) is taken to refer to Abraham.⁵⁴ The second part of this paragraph shows that brothers cannot save one another by reference to Ps 49:8. This verse is explained as if it is referring to two pairs of brothers: Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau. The last paragraph of this *piska* thus says that Ishmael and Esau cannot be saved by the merit of their fathers (Deut 32:39) nor by the merit of their brothers (Ps 49:8-9).

Sifre Deut 329 contains opposition against deviant views. According to some scholars Sifre Deut 329 is a polemic against certain Christian groups,⁵⁵ according to others against certain gnostic groups.⁵⁶ The exegesis of Deut 32:39 in Sifre Deut 329 contains a polemic background, but one should add immediately that this polemic does not concern only one view, but some distinguished heretical views.⁵⁷ The passage seems to be an anthology of arguments against various attitudes which the rabbis opposed, united by the use of the quotation from Deut 32:39. At least five types of heresies can be discerned, each heresy countered by a quotation from Deut 32:39: 1. those who say there is no power ('atheists'); 2. those who say there are two powers; 3. those who deny that God interferes in human affairs; 4. those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead; 5. those who believe that an ancestor can save a son ('merit of the fathers') or a brother can save a brother.

Some different groups can be considered as candidates for these heresies. The first heresy ('atheism') is possibly directed against certain views among the pagan-Roman world, as will be shown below. As we have seen above, the doctrine of the two powers may once have designated a specific group of sectarians, but it appears to have become a stock characterization of heresy toward the end of the tannaitic period.⁵⁸ Another heresy, the *denial that God interferes in human affairs*, could be aimed at the Epicureans, who were probably members of the Sadducean group. According to Josephus the Epicureans deny providence, and assert that the world is without a ruler and provider.

⁵⁴ Compare Is 51:1-2. See Bassar, *o.c.*, 242-244.

⁵⁵ Herford, *o.c.*, 289-290; A. Büchler, "Über die Minim von Sepphoris und Tiberias im zweiten und dritten Jahrhundert", in: *Judaica. Festschrift H. Cohen* (Berlin, 1912), 289-290; Goldstein, *o.c.*, 86-87; Hruby, *o.c.*, 60.

⁵⁶ Marmorstein, *o.c.* 488.

⁵⁷ So rightly Segal, *o.c.*, 89.

⁵⁸ See note 47.

They deny God's involvement in the affairs of men and the world.⁵⁹ Well-known is the attribution of the *denial of the resurrection* to the Sadducees. According to Josephus the Sadducees did not accept either the immortality of the soul or the idea of reward and punishment after death.⁶⁰ Also in rabbinic literature the denial of the resurrection is attributed to the Sadducees.⁶¹ However, also other groups are condemned by the rabbis because they deny the resurrection. According to R. Simeon ben Elazar in Sifre Num 112 the books of the Samaritans are wrong because they say 'the dead will not resurrect',⁶² and according to bSanh 90b-91 the denial of the resurrection is attributed also to the *minim*. Finally, the belief in the *merit of the fathers* is rooted deeply in rabbinic Judaism.⁶³ Opposition against abuse of the conception of the merit of the fathers is found, outside Sifre Deut 329, also elsewhere in rabbinic literature.⁶⁴

The author of Sifre 329 himself seems not to be interested in identifying one group or another with the heretical views. The midrash is mainly concerned with the *exegesis* of Deut 32:39 in its literary context. Therefore, vague indications as 'those who say' (אומרים) and 'he who says' (האמר) should not be interpreted primarily as referring to extra-textual groups or persons, but as referring to the text of Deut 32. It is probable that 'those who say' and 'he who says' refer to the subject of אמר in Deut 32:37.⁶⁵ However, the context of the midrash

⁵⁹ Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, X, 9,7 (277-278).

⁶⁰ Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, XVIII, 1,4 (16); *Bellum Judaicum* II, 8,14 (164-165). Compare: Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* IX, 29:1-2; Matt 22:23; Mc 12:18; Luc 20:27; Acts 23:8.

⁶¹ According to most interpreters the first statement in mishna Sanh 10:1 ('the one who says there is no resurrection of the dead') is referring to the Sadducees. See L.H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew. Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, NJ, 1985), 42; H. Sysling, *Techiyat Ha-Metim. De opstanding van de doden in de Palestijnse Targumim op de Pentateuch en de overeenkomstige tradities in de klassieke rabbijnse bronnen* (Zutphen, 1991), 126-128. Compare: J.H. Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth in der talmudischen Überlieferung* (EdF 82; Darmstadt, 1978), 51-62.

⁶² It is not likely that the Samaritans themselves denied the resurrection. See their interpretation of Gen 3:19 and Deut 32:39 in *Hilluk* 10, *Mimar Marqa* 4:12, and *Malef* 190. Probably the rabbis meant that according to the Samaritans the resurrection cannot be derived from the *Tora*. Compare bSanh 90b. See: R. Bóid, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Samaritan Tradition", in: M. Mulder - H. Sysling (eds.), *Mikra* (Compendia II.1; Assen-Maastricht-Philadelphia, 1988), 608-609; Sysling, *o.c.*, 76-78.

⁶³ See note 21.

⁶⁴ See bSanh 104a; Mek, *pisha* V (16); *beshallah* 4 (98); Midrash Tannaim, 62; M Ps 46:1; 146:2; ARN B 27 (54). Compare 4 Ezra 7:102-105; Pseudo Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 33:4-5.

⁶⁵ In MT an explicit subject of the verb אמר is lacking. See note 6.

suggests some sort of actualisation of the heresies mentioned in Sifre Deut 329. For in the preceding *piska'ot* v. 37-38 is put into the mouth of the 'the Nations of the World' (*piska* 327) by R. Nehemiah, and of 'evil Titus, the son of Vespasian's wife' (*piska* 328). Titus "entered the Holy of Holies and slashed two curtains with a sword and said: 'If He be God let Him come (אם אלוה הוא יבוא) and oppose this'." *Piska* 328 ends with the words: 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, is forgiving towards everything. He exacts immediate punishment for the desecration of His name'. The beginning of Deut 32:39aA ('See, now') proves that the punishment of God is executed immediately. Since R. Nehemiah proposes in Sifre Deut 327-328 'the nations of the world', i. e. Titus, as subject of אמר, it is possible to regard Sifre Deut 329 as a polemic against different views among the pagan-Roman world.

In Jewish literature the Roman Empire is denoted by the name Esau. For the first time it is found in 4 Ezra 6:7-10 (end first century C.E.). In rabbinic literature this denotation leads to a detailed explanation and actualisation of the Jacob-Esau story. In bBaba Batra 16b, Ex r 1:1 and Tanh Ex 1 'the rejection of the fundamental principle of religion' and 'the denial of the resurrection' are two of the five sins of Esau.⁶⁶ The rejection of the fundamental principle of religion (כופר בעיקר) is a *terminus technicus* for different kinds of blasphemy. It has a connotation of the denial of God, of the belief in more than one god, and of the denying that God takes notice of man.⁶⁷ In Sifre Deut 329 the term כופר בעיקר is not used. However, the heresies of the denial of God, of the belief in more than one god, and of the denying that God takes notice of man⁶⁸ are mentioned indeed. Moreover, also the denial of the resurrection is mentioned in Sifre Deut 329. This means that four of the five heresies in our midrash could be attributed to Esau (= Rome). The fifth heresy ('the belief in the merit of the fathers') is not attributed to Esau; it is, however, the name of Esau which is mentioned two times in the third paragraph. Esau could not be delivered by his father Isaac nor by his brother Jacob (= Israel).

Conclusion

In this article we studied the form and function of Deut 32:39 in its

⁶⁶ The others are 'seduction of a betrothed maiden', 'killing of a man' and 'despising his birthright'.

⁶⁷ M. Hadas-Lebel, "Jacob et Esau ou Israël et Rome dans le Talmud et le Midrash", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 201 (1984), 374. Compare Sysling, *o. c.*, 108-109.

⁶⁸ Urbach, *o. c.*, 26-30.

literary context. The verse is well embedded in its context (especially v. 37-39) and expresses the totality of the incomparability of YHWH. There is no area in life where YHWH does not exercise his power. The phrase of the incomparability of YHWH attests to his uniqueness. The verse does not contain a statement about the resurrection of the dead. Subsequently we studied the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Deut 32:39 in rabbinic literature. Because of the abundance of the material we confined ourselves to those texts in which one can identify some sort of controversy about the belief in one god. In two texts Deut 32:39 plays a part in the controversy about monotheism: in Mek, *bahodesh Yitro* 5 (parallels in Mek, *Shirta* 4, and MRS, p. 81) and in Siphre Deut 329. In Mek, *bahodesh Yitro* 5 Deut 32:39 functions as proof-text that there are not two gods. Only one God exists in the past and in the future, in this world and in the world to come. Sifre Deut 329 is an anthology of arguments against various attitudes which the rabbis opposed, united by the use of the quotation from Deut 32:39.

STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

IN HONOUR OF C.J. LABUSCHAGNE
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 65TH BIRTHDAY

EDITED BY

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